

The Return of Aphrodite.

BY GRANT ALLEN.

Deep in Cythera a cave,
Pealing a thunderous pæan,
Roars, as the shivering wave
Whitens the purple Ægean ;
There to astonish the globe,
Terrible, beautiful, mighty,
Clad with desire as a robe,
Rose Aphrodite.

Never again upon earth
Like her arose any other ;
Got without labour or birth,
Sprung without father or mother ;
Zeus, from his aery home,
Seeing the roseate water
Lift her aloft on its foam,
Hailed her his daughter.

Sweet was her shape, and is now ;
Sweeter the breath of her kisses ;
Delicate ivory brow ;
Wealth of ambrosial tresses ;
Mouth that no favour denies ;
Cheek that no ardour abashes ;
Languishing eyelids and eyes,
Languishing lashes.

Seeing her luminous face
Shine as the ocean that bore her,
Every nation and race
Worshipped her, falling before her ;
Chaplets they culled for her fane,
Fairer than any can cull us ;
Greece gave her Sappho's refrain,
Rome her Catullus.

Soft was the sound of their lyre,
Luscious their lay without cloying,
Till, as a billow of fire,
Crushing, consuming, destroying,
Wasting her wines in their spleen,
Spilling her costly cosmetics,
Swept the implacable, lean
Horde of ascetics.

Darkness they spread over earth,
Sorrow and fasting of faces ;
Mute was the music of mirth,
Hushed was the chorus of Graces :
Back to the womb of the wave,
Terrible, beautiful, mighty,
Back with the boons that she gave,
Sank Aphrodite.

Down the abysses of time
Rolled the unchangeable ages,
Reft of the glory of rhyme
Graven in passionate pages ;
Sad was the measure, and cold,
Dead to the language of kisses ;
Sadly the centuries rolled
Down the abysses.

Now in the ends of the earth
Tenderer singers and sweeter,
Smit with a ravening dearth,
Cry on the goddess and greet her ;
Cry with their rapturous eyes
Flashing the fire of emotion ;
Call her again to arise
Fresh from the ocean.

Hot as of old are their songs,
Breathing of odorous tresses,
Murmur of amorous tongues,
Ardour of fervid caresses ;
Trilled with a tremulous mouth
Into the ear of the comer,
Warm as the breath of the South,
Soft as the Summer.

Under the depth of the wave,
Hearing their passionate numbers,
Piercing her innermost cave,
Waken her out of her slumbers,
Soothed with the sound of their strain,
Beautiful, merciful, mighty,
Back to the nations again
Comes Aphrodite.

—*Temple Bar.*